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Smaczny, J. (2013). "'That great little man": Dvorak and Wagner'. In A. Belina, & S. Muir (Eds.), *Wagner in Russia, Poland, and the Czech Lands*. (pp. 93-119). Ashgate: Farnham: Ashgate Publishing.

Published in:

Wagner in Russia, Poland, and the Czech Lands

Document Version:

Early version, also known as pre-print

Queen's University Belfast - Research Portal:

[Link to publication record in Queen's University Belfast Research Portal](#)

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‘The great little man’ Dvořák and Wagner¹

Jan Smaczny

Some of the greatest romantic composers found Prague an intoxicating place. Even before the grand nineteenth-century edifices of the national revival, notably the National Theatre, and the Art Nouveau embellishments of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, were built in key locations near the river, Prague was a very beautiful city. Berlioz, on arriving in the city in 1846 to conduct a concert in the hall on Žofín (Sophia) Island, penned a near prose poem about the view from the castle height with its ‘torrent of houses tumbling to the Moldau and, below, the river making its way majestically through the town’.² Reminiscing about his teens nearly twenty years earlier, Wagner wrote that the ‘... antique splendour and beauty of the incomparable city of Prague became indelibly stamped on my fancy.’³

While Prague was unquestionably lovely, having built its grandeur across an unmatched landscape for nearly nine centuries, it was not in the early decades of the nineteenth century a city where musicians and composers were likely to make their fortunes. Mozart’s association with the city, notably with the commissioning and premiere of *Don Giovanni* on 29 October 1787, coincided with a quickening of Prague’s musical pulse, to a large extent prompted by a growing enthusiasm for Italian opera and the building in the Fruit Market of the thousand-seat Nationaltheater (later Estates Theatre; hereafter German Theatre) by Count Franz Anton Nostitz which opened its doors on 21 April 1783. The early years of the nineteenth century saw musical life fading somewhat. The abolition of religious orders, including the expulsion from the Empire of the Jesuits, by Josef II in 1773 removed a vital source of musical education⁴ and composers seemed locked into pallid imitations of Mozart for decades after his death. Carl Maria von Weber’s tenure as musical director of the German Theatre from 1813 alleviated this torpor, but it soon returned after he left for Berlin in 1816. Nevertheless, Prague remained a regular staging post for performers on their trek across the concert halls of Europe. During the last twenty years of his life, Jan Václav Křtitel Tomášek (1774-1850), proved something of a nexus for musical life. Described by his pupil, Eduard Hanslick, as the ‘... music-Pope or music Dalai Lama of Prague’,⁵ obeisance was duly made to him by visiting musicians of

¹ The quotation is adapted from an interview with Dvořák given to Paul Pry of *The Sunday Times*, 10 May, p. 6. The complete interview is reprinted in an appendix to David Beveridge ed., *Rethinking Dvořák: Views from Five Countries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), pp. 281-88. The original version of the quotation is given below see p. 4, footnote 28.

² Hector Berlioz trans. David Cairns, *The Memoirs of Hector Berlioz* (London: Victor Gollanz Ltd., 1969), p. 482.

³ Richard Wagner, *My Life by Richard Wagner* [authorized translation] (London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1911), p. 19.

⁴ Falling standards in church music eventually prompted a member of the noble Schwarzenberg family to found the Prague Organ School in 1830.

⁵ ‘... der “Musikpapst” oder “Musik-Daleilama” von Prag,...’ in Wapewski ed., *Eduard Hanslick Aus meinem Leben* [From my life] (Kassel: Baerenreiter), p. 21.

note including Berlioz, Paganini, Clara Schumann and, in the autumn of 1834, Wagner.⁶

In 1826 Wagner's family had followed his sister Rosalie to Prague where she was employed as an actress. Although the thirteen-year old Richard stayed in Dresden for the sake of his education, he made a number of visits to Prague and according to *My Life* was much charmed by the experience citing such attractions as:

The foreign nationality, the broken German of the people, the peculiar headgear of the women, the native wines, the harp-girls and musicians, and finally, the ever present signs of Catholicism, its numerous chapels and shrines, all produced on me a strangely exhilarating impression.⁷

During his visit of 1834, he made the acquaintance of the veteran director of the Prague Conservatory, Dionys Weber (1766-1842), who gave a performance with a student orchestra of Wagner's C major symphony composed two years before.⁸ Weber, who as a boy had met Mozart and heard a number of his Prague performances was also able to advise Wagner on tempi in Mozart's operas.⁹

Wagner was also closely associated with Weber's successor as director of the Conservatory, Jan Kittl (1806-1868), whom he first met on the visit of 1834. Kittl's musical instincts were a good deal more radical than the ultra-conservative Weber; he was on friendly terms with Liszt and Berlioz, and had a clear sympathy for their brand of romanticism as well as being a leading figure in facilitating concerts of new repertoire.¹⁰ In 1846, Wagner passed on to him his libretto of *Bianca und Giuseppe*, originally written for Karl Reissiger. The opera was staged in Prague's German Theatre, according to Wagner very successfully,¹¹ on 19 February 1848. Kittl was also decisively influential in the Prague premieres of *Tannhäuser* (25 November 1854) and *Lohengrin* (23 February 1856), both in the German Theatre, not least by permitting Conservatory students to augment the theatre's orchestra.¹²

Dvořák arrived in Prague to study at the Organ School, at the end of September 1857, a little over a year and a half after the German Theatre premiere of *Lohengrin*. At this stage, his musical horizons were, by his own admission, decidedly limited. In his interview to *The Sunday Times*, he painted a picture of a teenage musical education dominated by provincial church music in which performances of

⁶ See Ernest Newman, *The Life of Richard Wagner, vol. 1 1813-1848* (London: Cassell and Company Ltd.), p. 100.

⁷ *My Life*, p. 19.

⁸ *My Life*, p. 79; Newman, pp. 100-1.

⁹ Newman, p. 419.

¹⁰ See Jarmil Burghauser, Czech preface to Jan Bedřich Kittl, *Symfonie Es Dur, Lovecká* [Hunting Symphony] (Prague: státní nakladatelství, 1960).

¹¹ *My Life*, p. 277.

¹² Through the 1850s to the 1870s the size of the orchestra in the German Theatre was largely consistent and clearly inadequate for either opera by Wagner. The Theatre's Almanac for 1862 indicates the following forces: vln I: 6; vln II: 6; vla: 4; cello: 3; bass: 3; fl: 2; ob: 2; bsn: 2; hn: 4; tr: 2; trb: 4; tmp: 1; perc: 2; harp: 1 (see Jan Smaczny, 'Alfred: Dvořák's first operatic endeavour surveyed', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 115/1, 1990, p. 84).

Masses by Cherubini, Haydn and Mozart were the exception rather than the rule.¹³ While opportunities for hearing newer repertoire were still limited in Prague, they vastly exceeded anything Dvořák had encountered up to this time. The composer spoke enthusiastically of Josef Krejčí's (1821-1881) directorship of the Organ School. Krejčí, at that time director of the choir of St James (Sv Jakub) one of the major churches in the Old Town in Prague gave Dvořák the opportunity to perform in the choir and expanded other aspects of his musical knowledge:

Now it was that I first heard of Mozart, Beethoven, and Mendelssohn as instrumental composers; previously, indeed, I had hardly known that the two last-named existed ... The first real orchestral performance I ever heard – I shall never forget it – was a rehearsal at the Conservatoire, when I contrived somehow to slip in. The work performed was Beethoven's 'Choral' symphony, and the conductor was Spohr.¹⁴

Evidence that Dvořák was aware of specific influence on his early work is to be gleaned from a letter written to Eusebius Mandyczewski of 7 January 1898. Referring to his first string quartet (A major, B 8, 1862), he stated it was '... in the style of Mendelssohn and Beethoven and also Mozart'.¹⁵ In the next two paragraphs Dvořák mentions the influence of Schumann on his second symphony (B flat major, B 12, 1865) and that of Wagner in an overture of 1870 and the E flat major symphony (no. 3, B 34, 1873).¹⁶

Pinpointing Dvořák's exposure to Wagner's music in performance in the late 1850s and 1860s is not a comprehensively accurate science ; it is also compounded by Dvořák's less than reliable memory and the unreferenced accounts of others. In an interview given to the *Pall Mall Gazette*,¹⁷ for example, Dvořák claimed that he had heard Weber's *Der Freischütz* from the gallery of the German Theatre; in *The Sunday Times* interview, he failed to get in to the performance at all.¹⁸ While there is no direct contemporary evidence from Dvořák or his friends or associates that he ever attended any of the Wagner operas given in the German Theatre during his first twelve years in

¹³ *The Sunday Times*; see Beveridge, p. 284.

¹⁴ *The Sunday Times*; see Beveridge, p. 285. The concert to which Dvořák refers took place on 9 July 1858.

¹⁵ '... im Style Mendelssohn und Beethoven und auch Mozart ...'. The letter accompanied a list of works intended as an appendix for an essay about the composer by František Václav Krejčí ('Antonín Dvořák' in *Musikbuch aus Österreich*, II, Vienna-Leipzig, 1905). See Milan Kuna ed., *Antonín Dvořák: korespondence a dokumenty; korespondence odeslana* [Antonín Dvořák: correspondence and documents; correspondence dispatched], vol. 4, 1896-1904 (Prague: Bärenreiter Edition Supraphon, 1995), pp. 112-14.

¹⁶ Ibid.. Dvořák was referring to the *Tragic Overture* (Tragická ouvertura, B16a, 1870; published as *Dramatische Ouverture* by Simrock in 1912); the work originated as the overture to Dvořák's first, at that stage unknown, opera, *Alfred* (B 16, 1870).

See Smaczny, 'Alfred'.

¹⁷ 13 October 1886; see Beveridge, p. 291.

¹⁸ See Beveridge, pp. 285-6.

Prague,¹⁹ there is Karel Hoffmeister's claim made in 1924 (twenty years after the composer's death) that: 'Mořic Anger remembered that Dvořák at this time [the 1860s] gladly and frequently accompanied him to the German theatre, where Wagner's operas interested him immensely'.²⁰

Indisputable experience of Wagner's music, however, came in 1863.²¹ According to Wagner,²² the concert in February was arranged by Heinrich Porges to help raise funds for a trip to St Petersburg where he was to conduct further concerts. Press notices reveal there was already considerable anticipation in Prague as early as the middle of January.²³ While there appears to have been a considerable amount of uncertainty as to the final date of the concert in the Prague press, it was given at noon on 8 February.²⁴ Anticipation of the occasion was much advanced not only by the various press notices, but by the fact that the orchestra comprised not only that of the German Theatre, but also that of the recently opened Czech Provisional Theatre²⁵ (the first time the two orchestras were united in a performance) as well as players from the Prague Conservatory.²⁶ Wagner's statement that the event '... was crowned with great success'²⁷ was reflected in enthusiastic press coverage. Dvořák's memory of the occasion in his account to *The Sunday Times*, verged on the ecstatic:

¹⁹ *Tannhäuser*, premiered 25 November 1854; *Lohengrin*, premiered 23 February 1856; *Der Fliegende Holländer*, premiered 7 September 1856; *Rienzi*, premiered 24 November 1859.

²⁰ Taken from the translation of Karel Hoffmeister, *Antonín Dvořák* (Prague: J.R. Vilímek, 1924) by Rosa Newmarch: *Antonín Dvořák* (London: John Lane, 1928), p. 12.

²¹ Information supplied by Květ in his study of Dvořák's youth, J.M. Květ, *Mládí Antonína Dvořáka* [The youth of Antonín Dvořák] (Prague: Orbis, 1943), pp. 98-99 that Dvořák played in the 'Cecilia Society orchestra in a performance of *Das Liebesmahl der Apostel* conducted by Antonín Apt on 27 February 1858; the mention of a performance of the finale of act 3 of *Rienzi* on 6 May (Květ *ibid.*) appears to be erroneous (see University of Cardiff: Prague Concerts Database; accessed 24 July 2012). Apt conducted a performance of the finale of act 1 of *Rienzi* on 17 January 1857 with the Cecilia Society orchestra, but this was at least nine months before Dvořák arrived in Prague.

²² *My Life*, p. 862.

²³ Both the newspaper *Národní listy* (14 January 1863) and the arts periodical *Lumír* (15 January 1863) referred to plans for a 'great concert' in the hall on Žofín Island (Prague Concerts Database, accessed 25 July 2012).

²⁴ *Ibid.*.

²⁵ The Royal Provincial Czech Theatre (Královské zemské české divadlo, 1862-1883, was the precursor of the Czech National Theatre), for the performance of plays and opera exclusively in Czech, opened on 20 November 1862.

²⁶ The programme comprised the *Faust Overture*, the entrance of the Mastersingers (*Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, act 1 scene 3), Pagner's address (*Die Meistersinger*, act 1 scene 3), the prelude to *Die Meistersinger*, the prelude to *Tristan und Isolde*, 'Winterstürme' (act 1, *Die Walküre*), overture to *Tannhäuser*. Apart from the *Faust Overture*, the prelude to *Tristan* and the overture to *Tannhäuser*, all of the items were first performances in Prague. Information derived from the Prague Concerts Database, accessed 25 July 2012.

²⁷ *My Life*, p. 862.

I was perfectly crazy about him, and recollect following him as he walked along the streets to get a chance now and again of seeing the great little man's face.²⁸

While there can be little doubt that Dvořák's enthusiasm for Wagner's music was much advanced by the 1863 concert, the evidence of his musical influence is sporadic until the end of the 1860s. A tendency to headline complex ninth-related chords (notably bar 26 of the first movement of the second symphony) and a startlingly obvious reference to *Tannhäuser* in the opening ritornello of the first movement of the A major cello concerto (for cello and piano, B 10, bb. 119-127, see Music Example 1) suggest that Wagner's musical language was far from integrated. The works of 1865, Dvořák's most productive year in the 1860s which saw the composition of the first two symphonies, the A major cello concerto and the song-cycle *Cypresses* (Cypřiše, B 11), while often displaying remarkable originality, seem to build on pre-Wagnerian models. The three string quartets written toward the end of the 1860s and possibly into 1870²⁹ are typified by most commentators as being influenced by Liszt and Wagner.³⁰ Liszt's piano sonata in B minor may well have been the model for the E minor quartet which is also cast in a single movement with a central *Andante religioso*. There is also a good deal of 'Tristanesque' colouring, but, as is often the case, the convenience of such labels can conceal a great deal, in this case Dvořák's spiraling harmonic imagination which frequently pushes contemporary tonality to its limits.

Most considerations of Dvořák's first opera, *Alfred* (1870), to a German text, take Šourek's lead in assuming that the composer was intent on producing a Music Drama.³¹ If this were the case, it is not supported by his choice of libretto, Theodor Körner's *Alfred der Grosse* of 1811. While its clear championing of patriotic struggle was in tune with the tastes of Czech opera audiences who had so recently (1866) thrilled to Smetana's *The Brandenburgers in Bohemia* (*Braniboři v Čechách*), the conventions of the libretto, including its two-act structure belong to early nineteenth-century *Singspiel*. Körner's clear demarcation of numbers (chorus, recitative and aria etc.), a useful prop for a tyro opera composer, was for the most part adopted by Dvořák. His one major intervention where the libretto was concerned, however, might well be seen as an indication of more modernist tendencies: at the end of Körner's scene five, which concludes with a chorus for Danish soldiers just before a major

²⁸ *The Sunday Times*; see Beveridge, p. 287.

²⁹ In B flat major, D major and E minor (B 17, 18 and 19). Burghauser does not give firm dates for any of these three works, but postulates that they were probably written between 1868 and December 1870; see Jarmil Burghauser, *Antonín Dvořák: Thematický katalog* [Antonín Dvořák: Thematic Catalogue, hereafter BTC] (Prague: Baärenreiter Editio Supraphon, 1996), pp. 71-3.

³⁰ See Otakar Šourek, *Antonín Dvořák: život a dílo* [Antonín Dvořák: life and works], vol. 1 (Prague: Státní nakladatelství krásné literatury, hudby a umění, 1954), p. 110 f.; John Clapham, *Antonín Dvořák: Musician and Craftsman* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1966), pp. 160-3.

³¹ See Šourek, p. 58. For an extended consideration of the genesis and music of *Alfred*, see Smaczny, 'Alfred' and Jan Smaczny, 'Dvořák and Alfred: a first operatic endeavour surveyed' in Jitka Brabcová and Jarmil Burghauser eds., *Antonín Dvořák – Dramatik; Antonín Dvořák – The Dramatist* (Prague: Theatre Institute, 1994), pp. 23-49.

change of scene, Dvořák brings his first act to a conclusion, thus creating a three-act opera.³²

The music of the score shows many affinities with Wagner, most particularly the pre-*Tristan* works. *Tannhäuser*, in particular, seems to have supplied Dvořák with suitable ammunition for characterization in a libretto which badly lacks any real sense of confrontation. Tannhäuser himself seems to be the model for the arrogant Danish prince, Harald. Homage almost becomes parody in Harald's 'Schlachtlied' which is uncomfortably close to the start of 'Freudig begrüßen wir die edle Halle', the start of the 'Tournament of Song' (Music Example 2). In similar fashion the role of Alfred leans heavily on Wagner's Wolfram. Inevitably, there are tensions between Dvořák's clear embrace of the Wagner manner and the nature of the libretto. He relies, for example, to a far greater extent than the pre-*Tristan* Wagner on accompanied recitative convention and his approach to motif could hardly be described as consistently leitmotivic. Indeed, the recall in the third act of *Alfred* of the main melody of the duet between Alwina and Harald from the first act has more in common with the reminiscence of 'Di quell'amor' in *La traviata*.³³ There is also tension between Dvořák's developing musical language and the pervasive use of Wagnerian coloration. The first-act duet for Alwina and Harald was sufficiently consonant with his style five years later for Dvořák to import it (transposed from A flat major to G major) into the first act of the grand opera *Vanda* for the principal lovers, Vanda and Slavoj. Indeed, the same duet from 1870 may well have provided the model for the second-act love duet for Armida and Rinald in the composer's last opera, *Armida* (1904).³⁴ In general terms, *Alfred* reveals Dvořák's response to Wagner to be a musical rather than an ideological one; there is no real sense in which *Alfred* can be described as a Music Drama – the libretto alone would have prevented this. Moreover, the lack of integration of the pre-*Tristan* Wagner style is, in retrospect, a clear indication that Dvořák would later be able to adopt or reject it as it suited him.

The Wagner manner, however, is rather more integrated in Dvořák's second opera, the comedy *The King and the Charcoal Burner* (Král a uhlíř).³⁵ Dvořák himself attested to Wagner's influence in the somewhat chronologically garbled account he gave to *The Sunday Times*:

Yes; one of my chief ambitions when I began to compose was to write an opera. My first attempt was one called "König und Köhler" [The King and the Charcoal Burner]. The influence of Wagner was strongly shown in the harmony and orchestration. I had just heard "Die Meistersinger",³⁶ and not long before

³² There is also the consideration that Dvořák took full advantage of Körner's invitation to supply 'ein charakteristischer Tanz' in act 1 scene 3 with a ballet of 245 bars.

³³ As the lead viola in the Provisional Theatre orchestra between 1862 and 1871, Dvořák would have played in the first performance in the Theatre of *La traviata* on 15 July 1868, not much more than a year before he began work on *Alfred*.

³⁴ See Jan Smaczny, 'Vanda and Armida, A Grand-Operatic Sisterhood' in Beveridge, pp. 95-6.

³⁵ For an extended consideration of the genesis, music and a comparison of both versions of *The King and the Charcoal Burner*, see Jan Smaczny, 'Kral a uhlir I x II', in Brabcová and Burghauser eds., pp. 63-125.

³⁶ The opera had its Prague premiere in German on 26 April 1871.

Richard Wagner had himself been in Prague.³⁷

Dvořák's view was echoed by his Provisional Theatre colleague, Adolf Čech (later the first musical director of the National Theatre):

Like every young composer of his day Dvořák clung to the example of Wagner with his whole soul and endeavoured to emulate him. He took nothing less than *Die Meistersinger* for his model.³⁸

Unfortunately, as Dvořák himself admitted, the score was vastly beyond the resources of the Provisional Theatre when it went into rehearsal in 1873:

The piano and choral rehearsals began. But with one assent all complained that the music was too difficult. It was infinitely worse than Wagner. It was original, clever, they said, but unsingable. Persuasion was useless: my opera was abandoned.³⁹

According to Čech, Smetana, who as musical director of the Provisional Theatre had accepted the work for performance, was of the view that: 'This is a serious work, full of gifted ideas, but I think it cannot be performed'.⁴⁰ In complexity, *The King and the Charcoal Burner* was as far beyond the resources of the Provisional Theatre as would have been *Die Meistersinger* had they attempted it. The strenuous nature of the solo parts and the complexity of the ensembles (some with chorus subdivided into as many as eight parts) clearly defeated the company's personnel.

Notwithstanding moments of startling individuality (notably the modally-inflected first chorus for the charcoal-burners in act 1 and the conclusion of the finale of the same act, which has an almost Sibelian quality), the score of *The King and the Charcoal Burner* is much more consistently Wagnerian than that of *Alfred*. Taking *Die Meistersinger* as a model drew Dvořák much closer to the ideology of Music Drama than the *Tannhäuser*-influenced *Alfred*. Like *Die Meistersinger*, there is little sense of *The King and the Charcoal Burner* being a hybrid in part dependent on the musical conventions of grand opera. The use of motif is more consistent than in *Alfred* and Dvořák seems clearly to have grasped the symphonic potential of motivic units. A clear example of this is the transformation of a four note motif associated with the hunters into an effective accompaniment to a new melody.

³⁷ *The Sunday Times*; see Beveridge, p. 287. Dvořák was undoubtedly referring to Wagner's visit in 1863, eight years before the completion of the opera.

³⁸ 'Jako každý mladý skladatel v té době i Dvořák přilnul celou duší ku slohu wagnerovskému a snažil se jej napodobiti. Zvolil si za vzor nic menšího nežli 'Meistersingery'. Adolf Čech, *Z mých divadelních pamětí* [from my theatre memories] (Prague: Gregor and Sons, 1903), p. 90.

³⁹ *The Sunday Times*; see Beveridge, p. 287.

⁴⁰ 'Je to vážná práce, plná geniálních nápadů, ale myslím, že to k provozování nedojde'. Čech, p. 90. In fact, the opera has never been performed complete; the full score used for the sole production in the twentieth century (National Theatre, Prague, 28 May 1929 as part of a complete cycle of Dvořák's operas commemorating the twenty-fifth anniversary of his death) indicate that nearly a third of the opera was cut.

Dvořák's complete resetting of the libretto of *The King and the Charcoal-Burner*, made between April and November 1874, should be seen less as a repudiation of Wagner than a recognition of the realities of the performing resources of the Provisional Theatre. He was also beginning to acquire an audience among the salons of Prague for his songs and a much larger public after the hugely successful premiere of his cantata *The Heirs of the White Mountain* (Dědicové bílé hory) on 9 March 1873. Moreover, with his marriage to Anna Čermáková on 17 November 1873 and the arrival of a son, Otakar, on 4 April 1874, there were clear domestic imperatives for aiming at artistic success and developing a relationship with a local audience that had very little appetite for the musically radical. The premiere of the new version of the opera on 24 November 1874 was a modest success. According to a report in *Hudební listy*, Dvořák was personally applauded after each act.⁴¹ The opera was given, in Provisional Theatre terms, a respectable run of four performances (*Bukovín*, the first opera by Fibich to be staged in the Provisional Theatre – premiered on 16 April 1874 – was given three times). Critical opinion showed a surprising engagement with the issue of the work being a completely rewritten. Ludevít Procházka, a leading critic on the major Prague musical periodical, *Dalibor*, after drawing attention to the work's success described the contrast between the rehearsals of the original version of the opera and the new version in which soloists and orchestra were, apparently, 'delighted' with their parts.⁴² There is also an attempt to enlist Dvořák as a player in the national agenda for Czech opera with talk of a 'pure Czech art'. While the second version of *The King and the Charcoal Burner* owes a debt to Smetana's comic manner, it also leans fairly heavily on two popular German stalwarts of the Provisional Theatre repertoire, Weber's *Der Freischütz* and Lortzing's *Zar und Zimmermann* both of which would have been very familiar to Dvořák from his days as an orchestral player.⁴³

If the ideological aspect of Wagnerian Music Drama had passed in the second version of *The King and the Charcoal Burner*, elements of Wagner's legacy remained. The choral and vocal writing in the opera do reflect a new-found simplicity, but some of the orchestral music is tinged by Wagner, notably in the prelude to the first chorus in which the superimposition of triads over a pedal leads to a distinctly Wagnerian-sounding dominant ninth. Another aspect of Dvořák's experience with the first version that informs the second is its through-composed nature. While not attempting the seamlessness of Music Drama superimposed onto what is fundamentally a number opera libretto, Dvořák goes beyond Smetana's first two comedies, *The Bartered Bride* (*Prodaná nevěsta*) and *The Two Widows* (*Dvě vdovy*), both of which started life effectively as Singspiele and which later acquired a form of string accompanied 'secco' recitative. Dvořák draws the numbers together with an almost symphonic instinct that anticipates by almost exactly two years Smetana's first, consciously through-composed opera, *The Kiss* (*Hubička*; premiered in the Provisional Theatre on 7 November 1876).

For Dvořák in the early to mid 1870s, on the verge of what is usually accepted as his first musical maturity, Wagner has retreated from being an ideological model toward a means of orchestral and harmonic colouring. Both these features are at their

⁴¹ *Hudební listy*, 26 November 1874.

⁴² *Dalibor*, December 1-21, 1874, 398.

⁴³ *Der Freischütz* was given 49 times between 1862 and 1883; *Zar und Zimmermann* was given 22 times between 1863 and 1882. See Jan Smaczny, *The Daily Repertoire of the Prague Provisional Theatre* (Prague: Miscellanea musicologica, 1994).

clearest in the slow movements of the third (op. 10, B 34; 1873, revised 1887 and 1889) and fourth (op. 13, B 41; 1874, revised 1887 and 1888) symphonies. In the case of the third, the standard orchestra is augmented by cor anglais and, in the *Adagio molto, tempo di marcia*, the harp; the even more march-like central section of this movement is almost a homage to *Tannhäuser*. Although the fourth symphony moves away from the formal audacity of the outer movements of the third, *Tannhäuser* is also a presence in its *Andante sostenuto e molto cantabile* whose main theme, announced soberly in clarinets, bassoons and trombones, comes very close to the timbre, harmony and melodic character of the opening of the overture to *Tannhäuser*.

In reality, aspects of Wagner's style, and to an extent, his operatic ideology, remained a part of Dvořák's expanding musical vocabulary for the rest of his career. 'Neo-classical' ventures such as the String and Wind Serenades (opp. 22 and 44, B 52 and B 77), nationally-inflected works such as the Moravian Duets (op. 38, B 79) and first set of Slavonic Dances (op. 46, B 78), and the greater formal orthodoxy of such works as the fifth symphony (op. 76, B 54, 1875 revised 1887) and the piano concerto (op. 33, B 63) are indicative of a major change in stylistic direction from the mid 1870s onward.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the Wagnerian impulse has not entirely disappeared. In many ways, the fifth symphony sums up many of the characteristics of Dvořák's new stylistic direction: formal clarity (even if complete orthodoxy is challenged by a bridge passage between the slow movement and scherzo, and a finale that begins in the mediant) and a clear nod in the direction of national colouring with a subtle evocation of bagpipe texture at the beginning of the first movement and balanced phrases in the scherzo that unmistakably anticipate the first set of Slavonic Dances composed three years later. In the recapitulation of the finale, however, between bb. 241 and 247, Dvořák steps away from his more conventional style to introduce a sequence that appears almost entirely Wagnerian in colour.⁴⁵ While certainly ear-catching it seems far from being an aberration.

Of a similar nature, though given its context, rather more puzzling, is a passage from the penultimate movement, 'Inflammatus', of the *Stabat Mater*. Almost certainly prompted by the death of his daughter, Josefa, on 21 September 1875, only three days after her birth, the *Stabat Mater* was sketched between 19 February and 7 May 1876 (see BTC, p. 151). Dvořák then set the work aside, but returned to complete it by adding three movements (nos. 5, 6 and 7) and orchestrating the whole in the autumn of 1877, once again prompted by domestic tragedy in the shape of the deaths of his remaining children, Růžena and Otakar.⁴⁶ Influences on the work range widely from Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* in the finale to the prelude to Verdi's *La traviata* in the more operatic subsidiary material of the first movement. Equally important is Dvořák's clear adherence to Baroque conventions in many places. This last is hardly surprising: Dvořák often had recourse to figured bass when sketching, from the first symphony through to as late as his last opera, *Armida*. The nature of his musical education in the Prague Organ School, where Mattheson's *Der vollkommene*

⁴⁴ A number of contributory factors led to the crystallization of Dvořák's style at this stage including growing audience awareness of his music and not least, in 1875, the winning of the Austrian state prize for poor artists.

⁴⁵ Clapham typifies it as faintly echoing 'some of the harmonies of Wagner's "Magic Sleep" motif, from *Die Walküre*.'; see Clapham, p. 70.

⁴⁶ For more details concerning the genesis of the *Stabat Mater* see Jan Kachlík and Miroslav Srnka eds., *Dvořák: Stabat Mater* (Prague: Editio Bärenreiter, 2004), pp. VI-VII.

Capellmeister was still studied, was in essence little different from that of an eighteenth-century composer. Moreover, in Prague in the 1860s Dvořák had abundant access to pre-Classical music in which the repertoire had a significant concentration of music by Johann Sebastian Bach.⁴⁷ An example of Baroque convention in the *Stabat Mater* may be observed as early as the opening of the epic first movement with its descending chromatic phrases of mourning. The ‘Inflammat’ was among the original seven movements composed in 1876 and is one of Dvořák’s closest approaches to Baroque convention. In this movement it is possible to identify techniques such as walking bass, sequence, melodic figuration of decidedly Baroque cut and an extended, ecstatic *terce de Picardie*; this, the only solo aria in the entire work, is based on a ritornello structure with the first five bars recurring almost exactly three times with a modified fourth appearance. Notwithstanding this celebration of orthodoxy, shortly before the end Dvořák inserts four bars of ardent Wagnerian chromatics (bars 66-9) to the words ‘confoveri gratia’. The association of these words with Wagnerian harmony may be suggestive, but equally important is that the manner can appear in an apparently unlikely context (Music Example 4).

The anticipation and reception of Wagner’s 1863 concert indicates a high level of enthusiasm for the composer’s music in Prague. However, his operas were not performed in Czech in the Provisional Theatre and only appeared in the Czech National Theatre as late as 1885 with a production of *Lohengrin* given under the directorship of its highly influential František Šubert.⁴⁸ While Wagner operas would have been a severe test for the resources of the Provisional Theatre,⁴⁹ there were also ideological reasons why he was not performed there. Smetana was himself an admirer of Wagner’s music,⁵⁰ even if he felt distinctly wary of his personality and never met him.⁵¹ He also remained fundamentally modernist in his approach to opera; while turning down a five-act libretto based on the ‘wandering Jew’, *Ahasver* [Ahasuer], he

⁴⁷ For a more extensive consideration of Dvořák and early repertoires see Jan Smaczny, ‘Dr Dvořák steps off his world of baroque certainty’ in Jarmila Gabrielová and Jan Kachlík eds., *The Work of Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904): aspects of composition – problems of editing – reception* (Prague: Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, 2007), pp. 310-323.

⁴⁸ Šubert did much to expand the repertoire of the National Theatre and developed sensible working practices with the management of the German Theatre through the 1890s; see John Tyrrell, *Czech Opera* (Cambridge: CUP, 1988), pp. 48-9. 1885 also saw the appointment of the great Wagner adherent Angelo Neumann as director of the German Theatre where he remained in post until his death in 1910.

⁴⁹ When the Provisional Theatre opened in 1862 its orchestra comprised vln 1: 6; vln II: 6; vla: 4; cello: 3; bass: 3; fl: 2; ob: 2; cl: 2; bsn: 2; hn: 4; tr: 2; trb: 4; tmp: 1; perc: 2; harp: 1. In the early 1870s the composition was exactly the same; See Smaczny, ‘*Alfred*’, p. 84.

⁵⁰ In 1870 he travelled to Munich to see *Die Walküre* twice and *Das Rheingold* (see letters (12 July 1870 and 22 July 1870) to second wife, Bettina, referred to in Olga Mojžíšová and Milan Pospíšil, *Bedřich Smetana a jeho korespondence* [Bedřich Smetana and his correspondence] (Prague: National Museum, 2011), pp. 77-8.

⁵¹ See letter to Karel Bendl (24 July 1875) referred to in Mojžíšová and Pospíšil, p. 40.

added that ‘... only three-act opera can be justified and countenanced’.⁵² Nevertheless, in the febrile and vindictive critical atmosphere attendant on the development of a national opera in Prague in the 1860s and 1870s, accusations of Wagnerism as a danger to the national agenda were rife and often decidedly ill-considered: as John Tyrrell has pointed out, even Blodek’s innocent, light one-act comedy *In the Well* (V studni) could attract an accusation of Wagnerism owing to its being ‘thickly orchestrated’ or having ‘longer orchestral interludes’.⁵³

A focus for criticisms of rampant Wagnerism where Smetana was concerned, was over his third opera, *Dalibor* (premiered 16 May 1868). For critics determined to see Wagner in its pages, the use of thematic transformation and the, very occasional, use of Wagnerian harmony was excuse enough. The most virulent criticism – prompted as much by personal and professional antipathy toward Smetana – came from František Pivoda who accused him of extreme Wagnerism and even suggested renaming the opera ‘Dalibor Wagner’!⁵⁴ Smetana’s closest approach to Wagner was in fact a fairly brazen quotation of the start of *Das Rheingold* at the opening of his melodrama-setting of Goethe’s *Der Fischer* (Rybář) as part of a series of *tableaux vivants* staged on 12 April 1869 in order to raise funds for the completion of St Vitus Cathedral.⁵⁵

For all the highly-charged nature of the exchanges between Smetana, Pivoda and various other critics, they indicate more about the nature of infighting concerning the personalities involved than about the extent to which Wagner had penetrated the Czech national revival. The key figures in attempting to confront the principles of Music Drama and, indeed, to find a place for it in the developing traditions of Czech opera, were Zdeněk Fibich (1850-1900) and Otakar Hostinský (1847-1910). Their partnership over *The Bride of Messina* (Nevěsta Messinská) brought together two of the most formidable intellects of the Czech national revival. *Blaník* (Fibich’s second opera, premiered 25 November 1881) was already showing Wagnerian affinities including the use of a ‘... coherent system of motifs’.⁵⁶ Fibich’s enthusiasm for theatrical experiment appealed greatly to Hostinský who believed fundamentally in aesthetic experiment and also in a potential role for Wagner in the Czech national revival.⁵⁷ The result, premiered on 23 March 1884 in the new National Theatre, was

⁵² ‘... jen tříaktová opera odůvodniti a schváliti.’: letter to J.V. Frič, 10 February 1879 in František Bartoš ed., *Smetana ve vzpomínkách a dopisech* [Smetana in reminiscences and letters] (Prague: topicová edice, 1939), p. 154.

⁵³ Tyrrell, p. 213.

⁵⁴ See John Clapham, ‘The Smetana-Pivoda Controversy’, *Music & Letters*, LII/4, October 1971, p. 355. For a succinct account of the background to this aggravated spat, see Tyrrell, pp. 32, 34-5.

⁵⁵ Since *Das Rheingold* was not premiered until 22 September 1869, five months after that of *Rybář*, Smetana must have based his work on the vocal score of the opera published in 1861.

⁵⁶ See Jan Smaczny, ‘The Operas and Melodramas of Zdeněk Fibich’, *Periodical of the Royal Musical Association*, 109, 1982-3, p. 126. For a more recent consideration of Fibich’s operas, focused mainly on his works from the 1890s see Jiří Kopecký, *Opery Zdeňka Fibicha z devadesátých let 19. Století* [The operas of Zdeněk Fibich from the 1890s of the nineteenth century] (Olomouc: philosophy faculty, 2008).

⁵⁷ See two key articles by Hostinský, ‘O estetice experimentální’ [Concerning aesthetic experiment], *Česká mysl* (1900) and ‘Wagnerianismus a česká národní opera’ [Wagnerianism and Czech national opera], *Hudební listy*, I (1870).

The Bride of Messina to a libretto by Hostinský based on Schiller's *Die Braut von Messina*. Schiller's revival of the Ancient Greek chorus and rigorous observation of the dramatic unities seemed ideal material for a modern form of Czech Music Drama. The score contains a number of personal motifs, in addition to a 'fate' motif heard at the start, which are developed symphonically. Reflecting the intentions of Hostinský, Fibich evolved '... a simple manner of declamation without excessive melodic elaboration'.⁵⁸ The result was unchallengeably high minded and admired by certain critics,⁵⁹ but almost completely failed to win an audience among the Czechs.⁶⁰

Notwithstanding his disappointment and disillusion at the public reception of *The Bride of Messina*, Fibich did not give up on his Wagnerian project. Once again, Hostinský was instrumental in prompting him, in an article published in 1885 entitled 'O melodramatu' [Concerning Melodrama] (*Lumír*, iv-v, 1885, pp. 55-7 and 71-4). His stated view was that melodrama was a viable theatrical form, but conceded that a full five-act melodrama was unlikely to be composed. Fibich had revived Georg [Jiří] Benda's melodramas *Ariadne* and *Medea* in the Provisional Theatre on their centenary in December 1875 and went on to compose a number of small-scale melodramas in the 1880s. He later persuaded the writer Jaroslav Vrchlický to add two more four-act dramas to his existing drama, *The Death of Hippodamie* (Smrt Hippodamie) to create a cycle of three dramas entitled *Hippodamie* which were premiered separately in the National Theatre in 1890 and 1891.⁶¹ In many ways, full-scale melodrama was viewed by Fibich and Hostinský as the opportunity to realize Wagner's theories most effectively. While the orchestra developed the drama's psychological background through a symphonically-handled system of leitmotifs, the spoken dialogue would see that the mechanics of the drama were delivered with unrivalled clarity. His mistress, Aněžka Schulcová – later also the librettist of his three operas – opined that in melodrama only 20% of the words were lost as opposed to 80% in sung music drama.⁶² Even apart from the Wagnerian nature of the methods, the score of *Hippodamie* often closely approaches the musical language of *Der Ring*.

Against this background, Dvořák, in some ways, seems a rather isolated figure. Although he completed six operas in the 1870s he did not develop any effective or consistent relationships with librettists of quality, unlike Smetana and Fibich. While far from intellectually inert, Dvořák made no attempt to develop an operatic ideology at any stage in his career. His two serious operas from the 1870s and 1880s were both old-fashioned grand operas, *Vanda* (premiered 17 April 1876) and *Dimitrij* (premiered 8 October 1882). Curiously enough, the use of an old-fashioned format, in both cases complete with elaborate set pieces, double choruses

⁵⁸ Smaczny, 'The Operas and Melodramas of Zdeněk Fibich', p. 127.

⁵⁹ Notably Emil Chvála; see Smaczny, 'The Operas and Melodramas of Zdeněk Fibich', p. 128.

⁶⁰ *The Bride of Messina* was given 5 times in 1884, 2 in 1885 and 9 in 1888. While this was far from being a disaster, it was, by comparison with Dvořák's near-contemporary *Dimitrij* (premiered in 1882), which ran to 66 performances between 1882 and 1902, hardly a stellar success; figures derived from V and J Hornové, *Česká zpěvohra* [Czech opera] (Prague: Grosman and Svoboda, 1903), pp. 332-4.

⁶¹ *The Courtship of Pelops* (Námluvy Pelopovy, 21 February 1890); *The Atonement of Tantalus* (Smír Tantalův, 2 June 1891); *The Death of Hippodamia* (Smrt Hippodamie, 8 November 1891).

⁶² C.L. Richter (Schulzová's pseudonym), *Zdenko Fibich: Eine musikalische Silhouette* [Zdenko Fibich: a musical silhouette] (Prague: Urbánek, 1900), p. 70.

and ballets, did not prevent the occasional adoption of Wagnerian methods and colouring. In both operas personal motifs are used and often elaborated, alongside poignant reminiscence, in a symphonic manner. Gounod's *Faust*, the most frequently performed non-Czech opera in the Provisional Theatre,⁶³ is certainly part of the stylistic background in *Vanda* - there are strong parallels between the soldiers' chorus from act 4 of *Faust* and the victory march in act 4 of *Vanda*.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, a certain amount of effective colouring is borrowed from *Lohengrin* in the pulsating chords that accompany Vanda's dignified farewell before she throws herself into the river Vistula. In *Dimitrij*, to a libretto by Marie Červinková-Riegrová, and far superior to that of *Vanda*, the musical influences are better integrated, but the opera did develop a Wagnerian dimension in a comprehensive revision, dealt with below, made in 1894.

The prevalent view of Dvořák's style in the first half of the 1880s is that it aligns strongly with Brahms. This is certainly true in works such as the violin concerto – Dvořák was also closely advised in this work by Josef Joachim – and the sixth symphony. But as ever with Dvořák, the story of stylistic affinities is a complex one. His reaction to and assessment of audiences was becoming an increasingly powerful determinant in how he developed and conditioned his style. When it came to the audiences for the choral festivals in Birmingham and Leeds, Dvořák larded his style with archaisms that would have struck a chord with listeners attuned to the oratorios of Handel, Haydn and Mendelssohn. Thus, for example, we find fugal passages appearing in all of the choral works for England including no. 15 of *The Spectre's Bride* (Svatební košile), nos. 9, 17 and 45 of *St Ludmila* (Sv Ludmila) and the 'Rex tremendae majestatis' of the Requiem. However, these oratorios are decidedly eclectic works and, alongside the Baroque references, Wagner can again make an appearance, as in the climactic aria 'Virgin Mary, stand by me' ('Maria panno, přiř mně stůj') of *The Spectre's Bride*, in which an unfortunate maiden begs heavenly aid to escape the attentions of an importunate ghoul who has trapped her in a morgue, with its clear tribute to *Tannhäuser* (Music Example 4). It is also interesting that Dvořák appears to be associating the Wagner manner with a redemptive-religious trope as in the *Stabat Mater*. Even in a work as apparently orthodox as the seventh symphony, written for the Philharmonic Society of London and certainly influenced by Brahms, Wagnerian influence is also apparent. Tovey, while unhesitatingly placing the work on a par with the Brahms four symphonies and Schubert's 'Great C major', observed that in the slow movement '... horn and clarinet play the parts of a rustic Tristan and Isolde to a crowd of sympathetic orchestral witnesses'.⁶⁵ While this makes attractive reading, more convincingly Wagnerian moments are to be found toward the ends of the first movement (bb. 299-301) and of the Scherzo (bb. 224-33). Although it appears in the context of one of Dvořák's most successful orchestral Furiant, the usage is convincingly integrated.

The end of the 1880s witnessed a decisive shift in Dvořák's compositional orientation. Contact with highly enthusiastic audiences in England and disillusion with critical response in Germany and Austria seem to have prompted a broadening of horizons. Key in this change is the eighth symphony. Its free-wheeling formal

⁶³ Smaczny, *The Daily Repertoire of the Provisional Theatre*, p. 133.

⁶⁴ See Jan Smaczny, *A study of the first six operas of Antonín Dvořák: the foundations of an operatic style* (D.Phil dissertation, University of Oxford, 1989), pp. 345-7.

⁶⁵ The passage in question runs from bb. 32-38 of the *Poco adagio*; See Donald Francis Tovey, *Essays in Musical Analysis: Symphonies and Other Orchestral Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 276.

experiment and novel approach to motivic integration created evident problems for Brahms who found:

‘Too much that’s fragmentary, incidental, loiters about in the piece.
Everything fine, musically captivating and beautiful – but no main points!
Especially in the first movement, the result is not proper.’⁶⁶

There was, of course, no rebound back to earlier affinities with Wagner, notwithstanding clear references in the slightly later programmatic overtures *Carnival* (Karneval, op. 92, B 169) and *Othello* (op. 93, B 174) respectively to *Tannhäuser* and *Die Walküre*. However, it is interesting to note that Dvořák leaned heavily on Wagner in both design and detail in the *Requiem Mass* (op. 89, B 165) composed for the Birmingham Festival of 1891. The score is dominated by a leitmotif, memorably described by Dvořák’s main biographer, Otakar Šourek, as a ‘remembrance of death’,⁶⁷ which is used with great symphonic flexibility throughout this, the longest of Dvořák’s choral works. Even more tellingly, there seems to be a direct reference to *Tristan und Isolde* in the introduction to the ‘Tuba Mirum’. As in the *Stabat Mater*, and *The Spectre’s Bride*, Dvořák seems to be equating the Wagner manner with the religious sublime (Music Example 6).

A more serious engagement with Wagner seems to have been prompted by Dvořák’s encounter with Anton Seidl in New York. Seidl, a committed Wagnerian who had worked with Richter on the first performance of *Der Ring* and had lived with the Wagner family for six years, was principal conductor of the New York Metropolitan Opera from 1885 to 1891 and thereafter conductor of the New York Philharmonic until 1898; he also conducted the premiere of the *New World* symphony in 1893. According to Dvořák’s amanuensis in the United States, Kovařík, the composer met frequently with Seidl and discussed avidly Wagner’s music and working methods.⁶⁸ Kovařík also recorded that Dvořák was insistent during his exchanges with Seidl that *Tannhäuser* was the greatest of Wagner’s operas.⁶⁹ The first significant result of their contact was a comprehensive revision of the grand opera *Dimitrij* made between April and the end of July 1894 (B 186) in which over sixty percent of the score was changed. Many of its grand-operatic characteristics were removed or adapted and a great deal of the word setting was changed. Symptomatic of these changes was the revision of the prelude to the fourth act where an engagingly open ostinato over which the melodic material is floated is replaced by a brooding, darkly Wagnerian introduction (Music Example 7). Against the background of the popularity and general critical acclaim of the first version of *Dimitrij* (itself revised in

⁶⁶ Quoted in David Beveridge, ‘Dvořák and Brahms: A Chronicle, an Interpretation’ in Michael Beckerman ed., *Dvořák and his World* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 82.

⁶⁷ Otakar Šourek, *Zivot a dílo Antonína Dvořáka* [The life and works of Antonín Dvořák] (Prague: Státní nakladatelství, 1955), vol. 2, p. 339.

⁶⁸ See Josef Jan Kovařík, ‘S Dvořákem v Americe’ [With Dvořák in America], *Pestrá příloha Venkova*, 28/4, 1929. Parts of this article are reprinted in Otakar Šourek ed., *Dvořák ve vzpomínkách a dopisech* [Dvořák in reminiscences and letters] (Topicová edice: Prague, 1938), pp. 126–8. See also English translation by Roberta Finlayson-Samsour, *Antonín Dvořák: letters and reminiscences* (Artia: Prague, 1954), pp. 167–70.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 126 and 168.

many places), it is perhaps unsurprising that this radical revision met with little enthusiasm. Initially, Dvořák was sensitive concerning criticisms of Wagnerism and accusations that revisions do not improve works, citing the examples of Beethoven's *Fidelio* and Smetana's *The Bartered Bride* in his defence,⁷⁰ but it seems that he later changed his mind. For a performance in Plzen in 1904, he supplied the performers of the opera house with the first version.⁷¹

If Wagnerian influence sat rather ill in the context of the revision of a work that, as far as the public and most critics were concerned, was a palpable success, the adoption of the manner in Dvořák's next two operas was almost entirely beneficial both in terms of design and harmonic colouring. By the time Dvořák set to work on his two fairy-tale operas, *The Devil and Kate* (Čert a Káča, op. 112, B 201) and *Rusalka* (op. 114, B 203) in 1899 and 1900 in selecting such folk-orientated subject matter, he was rather bucking the trend prevalent in the National Theatre which clearly favoured verismo.⁷² While Dvořák certainly found the plots and atmosphere in both operas congenial, he was guided to both libretti by the influential director of the National Theatre, František Šubert.⁷³ Musically, each work has strongly Wagnerian features including extensive use of leitmotif. Wagnerian harmonic colouring is also strong, most particularly in *Rusalka*, but also in the second act of *The Devil and Kate* to the extent that it almost seems as if Dvořák had been leafing through parts of *Der Ring* by way of preparation (see for example *The Devil and Kate*, act 2, bb. 91-100).⁷⁴

In *Rusalka*, Wagnerian methods and colouring are, if anything, more effectively integrated and certainly suit the more serious mythic background to Kvapil's plot, influenced as it is by Andersen's *The Little Mermaid*, De la Motte Fouqué's *Undine* and Gerhard Hauptmann's *The Sunken Bell*. Motifs are used in a Wagnerian manner and one at least, the Water Goblin's 'curse' motif heard first in the prelude, bb. 48-53, has clear Wagnerian harmonic colouring. For the most part, however, the melodic accent is authentically Dvořákian, notably *Rusalka*'s beguiling and sinuous melody which originated in a sketch for the first movement of a cello sonata made in America in 1893.⁷⁵ Also, *Rusalka* is by no means a thorough-going Music Drama: many of its glories are all too excerptable, in particular its star number, *Rusalka*'s 'Song to the moon' ('Měsíčku na nebi hlubokém') and as a whole the opera

⁷⁰ See letter to Alois Göbl in Kuna ed., vol. 3, pp. 328-31.

⁷¹ See Milan Pospíšil, 'Dimitrij – A Challenge to Editors' in Beveridge, p. 101.

⁷² See Jan Smaczny, 'Czech Composers and Verismo' in Glen Bauer and Michael Beckerman eds., *Janáček and Czech Music: Proceedings of The International Conference, Saint Louis 1988* (Pendragon Press: Stuyvesant, New York, 1995), pp. 33-43.

⁷³ See Jan Smaczny, 'Dvořák, his librettists, and the working libretto for "Armida"', *Music & Letters*, 91/4, November 2010, p. 561.

⁷⁴ Ralph Vaughan Williams took a rather dim view of Dvořák's adopting the Wagner manner as is evident from a letter of 1899 to Randolph Wedgwood from Prague 'We went to the opera – all the part of it which dealt with Bohemian village life was tremendously good. But when we got down to Hell ... it got very dull – and much of the music was bagged from the 'Nibelheim' in Wagner's 'Rheingold'.' See Hugh Cobbe ed., *Letters of Ralph Vaughan Williams 1895-1958* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 36.

⁷⁵ See Jan Smaczny, *Dvořák: cello concerto in B minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 13.

is only enhanced by the act-two ballet and the little divertissement for the wood nymphs in the third. Thus, no conclusive categorical statement about Dvořák's Wagnerism can be made with any security. Anglophone commentary on Dvořák particularly in the mid century exposes the impossibility of trying to pin down the nature of Wagner's influence. Alec Robertson's Master Musicians study of the composer is symptomatic. A recurrent trope seems to be that Dvořák was, somehow, misled by Wagner. Speaking of Dvořák's music from the 1870s, Robertson states 'What happened has already been told; and doubtless it would have happened even if Wagner had not obscured his vision'.⁷⁶ Of the work of Dvořák's last decade Robertson speaks of Dvořák turning '... away from the classical highways' and entering on '...romantic bypaths ... blazed by Liszt and Wagner' adding, on a rather more sinister note 'We shall have to consider this deviation later on...'.⁷⁷ And yet, shortly before proclaiming that in *Rusalka* '... the texture of the music is even more defiantly Wagnerian than in *The Devil and Kate*', Robertson puts his finger on a fundamental truth 'In this opera Dvořák mingles old and new styles'.⁷⁸ For most composers in a Wagnerian and post-Wagnerian world, it was ever thus. The observation is as true for Richard Strauss and Humperdinck as for Dvořák in his operatic masterpiece which has proved its popularity with audiences for over a hundred years.

Josef Michl recalled a conversation with Dvořák, presumably from the late 1890s, in which the composer revealed an enthusiastic interest in the anti-Wagner writings of Friedrich Nietzsche.⁷⁹ While Dvořák conceded that Nietzsche's attack had merit, his final sally was an impassioned encomium to Wagner:

You know, about Wagner there is much to write and say – and you can criticize much – but he is undefeatable! What Wagner did none had done before him and nor can anyone take it away! Music will go on its way, leaving Wagner behind, but Wagner will remain exactly like the statue of that poet from whom they still learn at school today. Homer! And such a Homer will be Wagner.⁸⁰

This account has an epigrammatic quality that belies the cut and thrust of genuine conversation, but Dvořák's reaction seems genuinely to be that of a musician defending an irreproachable legacy. In so far as we have any indication of Dvořák's engagement with Wagner in ideological terms this is it.

Dvořák's last opera, *Armida*, paradoxically, both problematizes and simplifies the question of influence. On the one hand, while not quoting Wagner, there are

⁷⁶ Alec Robertson, *Dvořák* (Master Musicians Series. J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd.: London, 1945), p. 83.

⁷⁷ Robertson, p. 75.

⁷⁸ Robertson, p. 138.

⁷⁹ Chiefly 'Der Fall Wagner' of 1888 and 'Nietzsche contra Wagner' of 1889; See Michl below.

⁸⁰ Josef Michl, 'Z Dvořákova vyprávění' [From tales about Dvořák], *Hudební Revue*, VII, 1914. 'Víte, o Wagnerovi se dá mnoho mluvit a psát – může se mu i mnoho vyčítat – ale nice ho neporazí! To, co udělal Wagner, neudělal před ním nikdo a nevyvrátí to taky nikdo! Hudba půjde svou cestou dál, nechá Wagnera stranou, ale Wagner bude stát, zrovna jako socha toho básníka, z kterého se ještě dneska na školách učí. Homér! A takový Homér bude i Wagner!'.

aspects of the motivic material that lean heavily on the musical language of both *Tannhäuser* and *Parsifal*. The use of leitmotif is relatively systematic, but the frame is fundamentally un-Wagnerian. Jaroslav Vrchlický's libretto, originally written for Karel Kovařovic in 1888, is cast in four acts and contains many features, including a choral ballet, marches, processions, a divertissement and a large double-chorus conclusion to the second act, all of which are entirely consonant with the conventions of French Grand Opera. At the turn of the century, Dvořák seems to have rediscovered his love of Grand Opera and, personally, encountered little difficulty in integrating his near lifelong admiration of Wagner into a genre which for many was very much of another era. Nevertheless, if Otakar Dvořák's reminiscences of his father are to be believed,⁸¹ the composer attempted to persuade Vrchlický to reduce the four-act original to three, an interesting throwback to his own intervention in the libretto of Körner's *Alfred der Grosse*. His suggestion was rejected, although Vrchlický countenanced numerous, very practical, changes to the structure of the libretto, particularly in the first act, made by the composer.⁸²

Armida was a near failure at its premiere – the first Dvořák had experienced for nearly thirty years – and has also failed to establish itself in the repertoire, even in the National Theatre in Prague, notwithstanding four new productions over a century. And yet Wagner was not the problem. In a sense the whole project had been shaky from the start and gave Dvořák, normally a very fluent worker, many problems along the way.⁸³ The opera was out of time and out of tune with the requirements of its audience. Unfortunately, Dvořák died five weeks after the premiere of *Armida* and had no opportunity, as surely he would have taken given his track record with *The King and the Charcoal-Burner*, *Dimitrij* and *The Jacobin* (Jakobín), to revise the work. As has been noted above, in the *Stabat Mater* and the Requiem Mass Dvořák was adept at importing Wagnerian chromaticism into the fabric of the work for moments associated with the religious sublime. In opera, however, Dvořák proved himself, unlike Fibich, notably in the love-duet sequence in the second act of *Šárka* (1897), incapable of engaging with the erotic impulse in Wagner. The love duets in *Armida*, toward the end of the second and fourth acts, are unquestionably beautiful, but they are far from erotic. While he could handle the Wagner manner with virtuosity, the coordination of the style with the erotic in opera was closed to him.

Dvořák cast his compositional net very wide and Wagner was certainly part of the haul. But so are Brahms, Bach, Handel, Mozart, Schumann and Mendelssohn. Wagner is a big fish in this rich haul, but atomizing his influence as such commentators as Robertson do, is to misunderstand the nature of Dvořák's style, built as it is, astonishingly effectively from a wealth of source by example and appropriation. If the various strands in a composer's style were in constant opposition, there would be no style and this is palpably not the situation with Dvořák. Whether a work is more or less Wagnerian (inevitably *Rusalka* is the paradigm), or more or less Brahmsian, or even Verdian, are not an issues likely to exercise audiences

⁸¹ See Otakar Dvořák, 'Několik vzpomínek na vznik a premiéru Dvořákovy Armidy' [Various reminiscences on the origin and premiere of Dvořák's *Armida*], *Venkov*, 30 December 1928.

⁸² For a fuller examination of Dvořák's alterations to the libretto of *Armida* see Jan Smaczny, 'Dvořák, his Librettists, and the Working Libretto for *Armida*', *Music & Letters*, 91/4, November 2010, pp. 555-67.

⁸³ See Smaczny, 2010, p. 564-5.

notwithstanding all the fun music scholars may have as they ride out for a spot of 'influence spotting'.